

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

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ANNEX II

NEGOTIATING TRACK B -- THE DIRECT U.S. APPROACH

1. The starting point for this course of action lies in the acceptance of the present Communist position (endorsed by the Chinese, the North Vietnamese and the Khmer Communists) that Sihanouk is the man with whom Phnom Penh and Washington must deal and that direct discussions between the U.S. and Sihanouk are an essential first step toward a settlement. Attempts to try to strike up a dialogue with individual insurgent leaders in Cambodia or with members of Sihanouk's camp in Peking, Paris or elsewhere -- as Phnom Penh's leaders would prefer to do -- have little hope of success. The objective of a dialogue with Sihanouk would be to seek an understanding on a total cease-fire between the GKR and insurgent forces (which would include a simultaneous end to U.S. air and other military support for Phnom Penh) and agreement on negotiations between the GKR and the insurgents. The opposition's demand that Lon Nol and other members of the High Political Council be removed prior to negotiations presents a major problem. But once we have met Sihanouk's demand for direct talks with the U.S., he may well be prepared to soften this position. Lon Nol will obviously have to be dealt off somewhere along the line, preferably during rather than prior to negotiations. But if his retention of power proves an insurmountable obstacle to the realization of negotiations, medical treatment abroad can provide a graceful and relatively painless solution. Consideration may also have to be given to bringing in new faces to replace some or all of the present membership of the High Political Council. This would not necessarily represent a U.S. and GKR cave-in to Communist demands. Given the present Council's ineffectiveness and the continuing signs of political instability in Phnom Penh, a reshuffled government may emerge naturally in any case. Whatever political adjustments are made in Phnom Penh to facilitate progress toward a settlement, the U.S. should continue to maintain its present level of political and military support for the GKR as long as practicable.

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2. Peking's Role. Peking can be expected to facilitate U.S.-Sihanouk talks and support efforts to form a viable coalition government. The Chinese clearly want to see the fighting in Cambodia end. They would also like to see a return to the status quo ante, with a grateful Sihanouk perhaps again presiding as Chief of State -- if only initially as a figurehead. This situation would deny the Soviets any significant role in Cambodia, and would also tend to offset somewhat the political influence that Hanoi presently wields over the Khmer Communists. We could and should get the latter point across to the Chinese (and to Sihanouk himself) by indicating that we would want to do everything to maximize Sihanouk's future political independence and maneuverability.

3. The North Vietnamese. Hanoi naturally would be made aware of our decision to talk to Sihanouk. The North Vietnamese should be told that we expect them to help to arrange a cease-fire in exchange for a bombing halt. Moscow should also be put in the picture, and asked to use its influence on Hanoi to cooperate. There recently have been some signs of a softening of the Soviet position on Sihanouk, and Moscow should thus be able to take in stride a U.S. decision to talk to the Prince.

4. What are the chances that Sihanouk and the Communists would agree to work toward a peace settlement? Track B's proponents believe that at least for the first stage of the process they are good, provided the U.S. is willing to deal directly with Sihanouk as outlined above. Hanoi has consistently supported Sihanouk's demand for just such a contact, and it could not very well fail to come through if Washington yielded on this point. Moreover, Hanoi has already realized its most immediate and critical objective in Cambodia -- relatively unhampered use of eastern Cambodia. It will continue to enjoy this advantage regardless of the nature of a Cambodian settlement. Considerations such as this may not induce the North Vietnamese to press very hard on the Khmer Communists in the negotiations themselves, but they do seem compelling enough to get the negotiations started -- and certainly more compelling than U.S. actions that did not include direct contact with Sihanouk. For the Khmer Communists, there are other factors inducing them to stop short of complete military victory. The insurgents, whose political and administrative infrastructure is still being developed, probably are incapable of

governing Phnom Penh. They must see considerable advantage in moving into the existing government administrative apparatus in the capital and in other large urban centers through the coalition route. The Communists may also see some merit in achieving a large measure of control over the well-equipped FANK, which -- despite its present feckless condition -- represents an at least residual asset. Finally, the Khmer Communists have suffered considerably during the past year of fighting and there is no reason to believe that the insurgent rank-and-file would not join with FANK in welcoming a cease-fire.

5. Sihanouk's Reaction. For Sihanouk and his nationalist, non-Communist entourage, the advantages of compromise are more compelling. Sihanouk probably reckons that the sooner negotiations begin, the better his own position will be. If the war drags on indefinitely, the Khmer Communists' political power is sure to keep growing at his expense. Sihanouk may also reckon that once the fighting has stopped the internal political differences within insurgent ranks may sharpen and that frictions between the Khmer Communists and their Vietnamese Communist mentors may become more pronounced. Such developments undoubtedly would work to his own political advantage in being able to preside again over a bureaucracy with which he is quite familiar.

6. What are the chances that Lon Nol and company would agree to seek a settlement, particularly one that resulted in Sihanouk's return to Phnom Penh? This would be a bitter pill to the High Political Council, especially to Lon Nol and Sirik Matak -- who were the architects of Sihanouk's ouster. But, faced with the prospect of the loss or reduction of U.S. support, they probably would have little choice but to go along. With the exception of Lon Nol, the other Council members are aware of the magnitude of the country's problems and their inability to do much to remedy them. And In Tam and Cheng Heng, at least, are disposed to bringing the Khmer Communists into the national body politic on a formal basis.

7. If talks with Sihanouk bear fruit, U.S. interest and objectives in the subsequent negotiation of a coalition government are reasonably clear. Aside from bringing what influence it can to

bear on ensuring adequate representation in a coalition for the present Phnom Penh regime, the U.S. should attempt to maximize the role of Sihanouk, Penn Nouth, and other nationalist, non-Communist elements at the expense of the Hanoi-oriented Khmer Communists. This will be difficult, but with the Chinese probably playing much the same game, Hanoi will be under some pressure to compromise. Perhaps the best that could be hoped for is a coalition along the lines of the one now taking shape in Vientiane -- but with Sihanouk and his supporters playing the role of Souvanna Phouma and the "neutral" center. Since returning from his trip to Cambodia, Sihanouk has been publicly stressing that his role in any new Cambodian government will be subordinate to that of the Khmer Communists and his remarks no doubt reflect the pragmatic agreement Sihanouk has struck with his Communist associates. Such a government would be weighted in favor of Hanoi's interests and there is no guarantee that it would not quickly degenerate into a North Vietnamese satellite.

8. Nevertheless, Track B's proponents believe that a coalition including Sihanouk does hold out some hope of a government something less than an outright client of Hanoi emerging in Phnom Penh. It even offers the possibility of a continued measure of U.S. political influence. Sihanouk is no friend, but he is a known quantity. He can be counted on to try to resume his balancing act upon returning to Cambodia and, perhaps with a little encouragement from his Chinese friends -- and possibly from a U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh -- to try to minimize North Vietnamese influence. Sihanouk should be told that, while his government may well be dominated by the Khmer Communists, we would hope that he would strive to attain some measure of independence and that we would do whatever we could to help him to achieve that end.